

## MINUTES

### **Livingston Parish**

**May 12, 2021**

Pursuant to notice duly posted in the public lobby of the Livingston Parish Governmental Building, the Livingston Parish Citizens Drainage Committee met on May 12, 2021, at the hour of six o'clock (6:00) p.m. in the Parish Council Chambers, located in the Livingston Parish Governmental Building, 20355 Governmental Boulevard, Livingston, Louisiana with the following members present:

Joey Sibley  
Brian Clemmons  
Pat Genre  
Kevin Hull  
Stephen Howze  
Ron McMorris  
Eileen McCarroll  
Ernie Balfantz  
~~Eric Harrell - Vice chair~~  
Shane Marler- Chair

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The Chair, Shane Marler, called the meeting to order and asked Mrs. Sandy Teal to call the roll. All were present but Mr. Sibley and Harrell. Mr. Sibley later entered the meeting around 6:20 p.m.  
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The Chair read agenda item 2 *Old business*, and Mr. Hull asked for the engineering study/report from the Parish President's Office on the Hwy 22 Gapping Project "GAP 22". Councilman Randy Delatte approached the podium and stated that what Mr. Hull was speaking about was what the Livingston Parish Council had voted on to remove the suit from Livingston Parish. He added that it was around a 42-million-dollar project to raise highway 22 to allow Ascension to add additional pumps to pump water under it. He added that most people think the Diversion Canal to be the dividing line between Livingston and Ascension Parish but that it was Bayou Pierre. So, some of that property could be in either parish. Mr. Hull wanted to know where they were proposing to cut the gaps on highway 22. He was looking at a WAFB report interviewing the Parish President that was done in March. Delatte stated that it was sold to the council with the model by the engineers with a negative impact as the model was done in conjunction with the Comite-Diversion. By putting the two projects together a relief somewhat would come from the Comite-Diversion, but by allowing Ascension to do the pumping, no negative impact resulting, bringing it back to being "even" bringing it back to where it currently is. In theory, Delatte said that people in Livingston Parish had been paying taxes on millages on the Comite-Diversion for a long time to get a benefit, and not to be even. He felt that Ascension failed to disclose the wall that they were building to ..... McElroy Swamp which will tremendously affect Livingston Parish during the storm surges. He felt that Mr. Hull had a legitimate question. The chair asked about the date of the article which was March 23, 2021. Mr. Marler inquired as to when the lawsuit was worked out and Councilman Delatte stated that about two council meetings back the Parish President had asked the council to remove the lawsuit saying that his engineers had looked over Ascension's claim saying that there would be no impact on us. So, Ascension Parish was not supposed to do anything additional until the Comite-Diversion was done. Delatte stated that it was a win-win situation for the parish. In close, the chair addressed Mr. Hull's request and stated that they would see if they could set up a meeting for the information that he wanted. Mr. Hull replied that a meeting or just a summary of the report would be fine.

Mr. Howze asked about the Cooperative Endeavor Agreement and Councilman Shane Mack approached the podium. Mr. Mack stated that he read the C.E.A. and he understood why some (Parish President and some mayors) did not want to enter into that agreement where certain rights and authority are given away. He applauded this committee for working with the engineering firm with Gravity Drainage District No. 1 to identify that very important project. He offered some accolades to the Master Plan Review Committee and things in the works about the Juban North Extension Project. He explained that the committee worked in a unified effort with other government entities and administrations to put that project together and to show the parish including higher up officials, that everyone was involved and wanted to focus efforts on. He did not feel that the C.E.A. would be signed, but he encouraged continued efforts with those involved and others (Parish President and an administrative assistant, parish review engineers, mayors such as Denham Springs and Walker, community) to be the driving force behind drainage improvement projects in the parish. He suggested maybe doing a drainage study, maybe cleaning out existing drainage, perhaps developing a project to improve the drainage under the interstate, etc. He suggested maybe adding Florida Blvd. and Canadian National Railway as all those transportation infrastructures run east and west as water flows north and south. Any projects would want to have no negative impact but a positive one. He encouraged getting a resolution from the City of Walker and maybe a letter from the mayor of Walker as well as allowance of time to consult with the council and higher elected officials. He suggested making a list and prioritizing it and securing support in such drainage improvements. Mack added his opinion that a gravity drainage district was needed all over Livingston Parish to implement drainage improvement projects and to maintain drainage systems. He spoke of the 80% of unfunded gravity drainage districts and that many citizens believe that the Parish President and the Department of Public Works should take care of them. However, he stated that it was a major problem because taxes that fund DPW are not written for that purpose. Mack said that the plan was to get Gravity Drainage District No. 8, made up of the unfunded districts councilmen, funded. Once that happens, Mack stated that dedicated funding and resources will be available to listen to this committee's ideas and to fund those drainage improvement projects. He hoped that this could be the beginning of a consolidated gravity drainage district for all of Livingston Parish.

Mr. Howze added that the drainage districts simply keep the ditches clean and flowing, but that they cannot afford anything else such as new canals with mitigation fees. From the Watershed, he felt that they needed some major benefits other than cleaning ditches such as maybe widening them. Mr. Clemmons felt that a dedicated person was needed by the parish to work with the Army Core of Engineers. Mack suggested that the committee put together a master gravity drainage plan with studies and project prices behind it. He also suggested working with Garrett Graves on any Core of Engineers issues.

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The Chair moved to item 3a, *New Business: Presentation and Discussion by Regional Watershed Coordinator(s) for the Region 7 Louisiana Watershed Initiative* as the Regional Watershed Coordinator gave a presentation and handed out packets. Rachelle Sanderson introduced herself as the Region 7 Watershed Coordinator and that she worked at Capital Region Planning Commission. Her colleague, Evelyn Campo with the Office of Community Development introduced herself and said that not only worked with Ms. Sanderson and Region 7 but the other state regions as well and that she was on the state/OCD side. Pat Forbes with the LA Office of Community Development stated that they were one of five agencies in the Watershed Council that the Governor created for flood mitigation.

Ms. Sanderson gave an overview of L.W.I. in terms of Region 7. She spoke about the Regional Steering Committee and the L.P. Representative being Steve Kistler with Mark Harrell being his alternate.

Mr. Pat Forbes reminded the board that the Governor wants changes in the way that we fundamentally address flood risks in the state, but that we had to do something right now to reduce flood risks. That includes over ¼ billion dollars being invested, but that over 600 million or more would come over the next ten years.

Evelyn Campo wanted to express the importance of “making our case” to get people behind projects in our area. She encouraged coordination with other parishes and entities to bolster their argument of what they needed. By becoming an ally, the core may be more apt to listen. She suggested perhaps coordinating with neighbors in the north. She reiterated what Mr. Howze said in that large scale projects are needed, and they cannot do that alone. Mr. Howze asked if Watershed money could be use in mitigation. A brief discussion ensued on wetland mitigation credits, etc.

Councilman Delatte suggested a project including East Baton Rouge and Ascension since they put a lot of water on Livingston. Round One scoring gave more points with more entities benefiting. He stated that every bit of water had to go through North Pass which is currently twenty-two feet deep. Lake Maurepas was three foot or less in most places. Current projects, such as the Weir, would not benefit until they get a channel through Lake Maurepas to the North Pass. He briefly spoke of a failed attempt of the council to get shell dredging back.

Councilman Mack briefly discussed the 15-million-dollar project that was funded which identified canals/tributaries/creeks and debris would be cleaned out to allow better drainage. No equipment would be used to dig out canals to his knowledge. The Hwy 22 bridge raising project was the 42 million dollar one. Mack stated that there was an argument as to whether it would help or not. He felt it to be a valid request to obtain a copy of the study. Forbes added that the 15-million-dollar project was a continuation of another federally funder project. Delatte offered accolades to the Parish President and to Mark Harrell for the 15 million and noted that District 8, his district, would benefit a lot from that.

Councilman Delatte shared that he met with Mr. Layton Ricks and that he and his two people, Harrell and Kistler, were on top of things for the next round. Delatte admitted that he was confused at the start and felt that maybe the committee needed to go to the Watershed Committee. Now, perhaps the parish and Administration would need to decide where the grants are at. The Parish President was willing to meet with anyone on the committee one-on-one. Delatte did agree with Mack in suggesting submission of a list and felt that the ideas and feedback from the committee were valuable.

Mr. Delatte stated that Ascension Parish chose for the first time not to pump in advance of a rain. By pumping before, our parish floods before the rains. Mr. Balfantz said that water in Ascension Parish is trying to go to the Mississippi River, but it ended up on us. Delatte added that there were two things that would need to be fought. One being rainwater and the other tidewater due to permitting to build levees through the McElroy Swamp on the Hwy 22 project. Mr. McMorris asked how we could be assured that Ascension Parish will not pump on Livingston Parish again. He also questioned whether the Hwy 22 project was good if the Comite-Diversion project went through. His concern was with lower Livingston which is what keeps flooding. Councilman Delatte gave credit on suit negotiations to the Parish President and to the legal department. Although, he did add that he voted no on withdrawing the suit. Councilman Delatte said that the

language would be such that no adverse effect could be on us by way of the Comite-Diversion project being complete first. Delatte said that Congressman Graves called him personally as Delatte was upset about the freshwater being brought into the lake from the Mississippi River. Graves spoke of the benefits of the freshwater and of earned mitigation points to allow for future flood related projects. Delatte wondered why pumps could not be put into canals, but Graves stated that was not funded. In conclusion, Delatte spoke of our state delegation and suggested that the same group of five state legislators, such as Buddy Mincy, author a bill getting Livingston into the Pontchartrain Basin. Mrs. Pat Genre asked how to get into the Pontchartrain Basin group and a brief discussion ensued. Councilman Mack approached the podium and spoke about looking further into the idea to determine if that is what is needed. Perhaps the council could pass a resolution if that would come to fruition. The chair allowed him to speak briefly on the newly established Gravity Drainage District No. 8 committee that would be meeting soon. Mr. Sibley questioned why shell dredging could not happen. Delatte explained that the process stopped in 1983 when there was no flooding. Mr. Sibley wondered if the fifteen-million-dollar project would really help flooding since the flood water is back-up water. Sibley felt that perhaps dredging would be an effective project.

Mr. Pat Forbes approached and spoke of an advantage to Livingston Parish since an Amite River model was funded before others whereas others in the state may be waiting eighteen months to two years. He added that they were also working on a model with CPRA a transition zone model that would have a big impact on the parish. He added that the model showed that dredging out the mouth of the river into the lake had almost no effect on flooding. The transition zone model would be able to run different scenarios. He spoke of the 100 million dollars with \$60,000,000 going to the highest scoring projects and \$40,000,000 (\$5,000,000 to each region). Those projects, stated Forbes, will not need a lot of modeling. However, they will have better and bigger regional models such as the transition zone model. Thus, the twelve-year time span on the grant to assure that everyone is working together to do only the “smart thing” that do not hinder but benefit one another. Delatte mentioned that there was a disagreement now as to the route of the Amite River, thus delaying that project. Balfantz thought that Blind River was the problem and wondered if a study had been done on Blind River running into Lake Maurepas.

Ms. Sanderson concluded with a reminder that she would get everyone’s emails to keep them informed of upcoming meetings.

The Chair did not read aloud agenda item 3b, *Discussion and Review of Master Drainage Plan for the Parish of Livingston* but the topic remained a common thread throughout.

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The Chair read agenda item 4, *Other Business*, having none, he moved to adjourn. There was no mention of agenda item 5, *Committee comments/concerns*.  
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Having no other business, a **MOTION** was offered by Stephen Howze and duly seconded by Ron McMorris to adjourn the May 12, 2021 meeting of the Livingston Parish Citizens Drainage Committee, with no further discussion and where none opposed.

/s/ Angie Cornett  
Angie Cornett, Deputy Clerk

/s/ Shane Marler  
Shane Marler, Chairman